



Republican Perspective

State Rep. Peter Abbarno

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Watch: <https://tvw.org/video/2023-legislative-republican-perspective-2023011076/?eventID=2023011076>

Good afternoon. I am State Representative Peter Abbarno of the 20th Legislative District.

I am honored to deliver a response to the Governor's state of the state address and provide the citizens of Washington a vision of hope and opportunity.

I am an attorney, small business owner, but – most importantly – a husband and father.

I believe we deserve a clean, safe, and prosperous Washington filled with opportunities for each and every one of us. A place where everyone can receive a quality education, earn a livable wage, raise a family, own a home, and enjoy their neighborhoods.

Sadly, too many have lost hope in that future.

And that's where we must start. We must chart a new course toward a brighter future for Washington – one built on hope, not fear.

For ten years, the Governor's personal agenda – supported by his majority party in the Legislature – has failed on critical issues such as affordability, public safety, housing, homelessness, and education.

You can draw a straight line from the policies of the Legislature and Governor to many of the problems we face today. Policies that have made life in Washington more expensive, left our communities more dangerous, and failed to provide children with the education they deserve.

Too many families are struggling financially. Too many children caught in the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Too many seniors forced to cut essential items from their budgets. Too much crime in our neighborhoods.

The antidote for the hopelessness that many are feeling is **real solutions** for the real problems we face every day. I call them kitchen table issues. The things that mean the most to us. The issues you discuss with your family and friends around the kitchen table.

The cost to feed your family, heat your home, and drive to work. The availability of childcare. Accessibility to quality educational opportunities. The increased crime in your community.

These are just some of the issues the Governor mentioned in his address to you, but what he failed to mention is that these issues just keep getting worse under his policies.

What we need are **real solutions** that help build stronger families, stronger communities, and a stronger Washington. Solutions that put people before programs and touch every corner of our state.

Everyone should have an opportunity to succeed, and no one should be left behind. This is our home and we should all expect better.

I live in Centralia, a high-poverty community where over 83 percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunches. A community, like many of yours, labeled a childcare desert.

When our daughter was born in 2011, my wife was waitressing and enrolled in college to become a teacher. I had just started a new job. We both worked full-time. We didn't make enough to afford childcare but made too much to qualify for meaningful relief.

I still remember the tears and painful choices. I remember taking our newborn to work. I remember my wife taking our newborn to classes.

It shouldn't have been that way 11 years ago. Unfortunately, across Washington, new families still face those same tearful decisions.

Parents are forgoing educational and employment opportunities because childcare is not accessible or affordable.

Unfortunately, the Governor and his party have neither provided meaningful economic relief nor created opportunities for families to succeed. As a result, many families are stuck in what feels like a hopeless cycle of struggle.

A decade of the Governor's speeches just like the one you heard, and continued reckless spending, have not produced the result we all deserve.

I am here to tell you that it is not too late and there is reason to be hopeful about our state's future; a state blessed with an abundance of natural resources and human ingenuity. That success can be found – not by investing in government, but by investing in you, by trusting you, by providing you the tools and opportunities to blaze your own pathway to success.

Let's talk about these **real solutions**.

On affordability, we could reduce the sales tax, which disproportionately hurts lower and fixed-income Washingtonians.

We could provide property tax relief and build more homes so that young families can own a piece of the American dream.

We could expand the working families tax credit to get more money into the pockets of our neighbors to provide for greater economic security.

We should invest in education, early learning, and childcare opportunities for working families.

For years, the Governor and his majority have spent billions on housing programs while housing accessibility and affordability have only worsened. In fact, Washington has the fewest housing units per household of any state in the country. The Governor's policies have put us last in the nation.

Many young people can't afford to live where they grew up, and many seniors are struggling to stay in their own homes.

But it doesn't have to be this way. There is a better way than the Governor's status quo.

Republicans have policies that could turn this crisis around, provide hope, and build a pathway for you to fulfill your American Dream.

Let's roll back burdensome regulations that are preventing new housing. The layering of costs and regulations are eliminating your opportunities to build a home, build stability, and build a future.

Let's invest in infrastructure to create housing.

Let's work with local governments to open new areas to housing and increase density. More housing will lower prices for homeowners and renters, reduce wealth inequality, and grow the economy.

And, critically, more housing could help reduce the rate of homelessness.

For years, the majority has promised to solve the homelessness problem in our state – even declaring it an emergency in King County seven years ago. But current policies from the Governor and his majority party have only made it worse.

The perpetuation of poverty and homelessness in Washington is nothing less than a humanitarian crisis exacerbated by this Governor's policies. Too many are living in inhumane, makeshift encampments in public spaces.

This tragedy requires a very robust, compassionate response.

It's time to end the circulation of deadly drugs on our streets and in our schools.

We must provide effective treatment for people suffering from addiction and mental health challenges.

Let's stop measuring success by the amount of money spent, but instead by the number of people we help lift out of poverty, help address their mental health, and support life in sobriety.

As the husband of a public-school teacher, I have a deep appreciation for the essential work our educators and school staff do and understand their unique challenges. I routinely witness the needs as a classroom mentor and volunteer. I see it as a father of two students. And I hear the struggles daily.

Unfortunately, prolonged school closures, initiated by the Governor, had devastating, long-lasting consequences. And those decisions hurt low-income students and students of color disproportionately.

Test scores continue to decline significantly. These setbacks from COVID shutdowns magnified a struggling education system that has already failed so many students, limited learning opportunities, and trapped them in a cycle of intergenerational poverty.

Now we have the opportunity to come together and increase our investment in a quality education system that prepares students to flourish in the modern economy, recognizes that every student is unique – find their passion, cultivate it, and prepare them for a successful career they love.

It's time to strengthen accountability in our diverse education system, and it's time to recognize parents as necessary and integral partners.

Education does not start or finish in the classroom. Education begins and ends in the home.

Schools must engage parents as active participants, and we must provide them with resources and real choices.

As we look to the future we want our children to live in, the Governor must begin to recognize the policies that are not working. Front and center are the failures made in the recent police-reform policies.

Every one of us in these past few years has either been a victim of a crime or knows someone who has. From property crimes to violent crimes, many communities are just not safe or don't feel safe.

Washington now has the fewest law enforcement personnel per capita. The need for more highly trained police officers on the street is essential. But again, the Governor's policies have left Washington last in the nation.

The 2021 anti-police bills supported by the Governor and his party had disastrous consequences. While the Legislature addressed some of these issues last year, critical work remains – including restoring the ability of law enforcement to pursue suspects in their vehicles, the need to recruit, train, and retain new officers, and provide law enforcement the necessary tools to keep us all safe.

Fentanyl and other hard, addictive drugs have a devastating impact on our communities. We should not normalize the sale, distribution, and use of those drugs, which was the result of the Blake decision. It is incumbent on the Legislature to act now.

I remember rarely giving a second thought about my children playing in the neighborhood. The rise in crime came to my doorstep over the summer when a troubled, paranoid, recently released inmate pulled up in front of my house thinking he was being followed and fired three shots. One of those shots hit my neighbor's porch.

Unfortunately, this story is all too common.

We can turn our state around by prioritizing victims over criminals, preserving the rights of law-abiding citizens to protect themselves, their homes, and businesses. And making sure the judicial system has the ability – and our support – to deliver justice by not allowing repeat criminals to terrorize our neighborhoods.

There are those in power who – year after year – sell us a future based on fear. They would have you believe the status quo is the best we can hope for because, for many of us, that is all we have known after a decade of the same people promising change that never comes.

But I don't believe that.

I believe, by charting a new course based on **real solutions**, that Washington's best years are ahead of us. And that we have it within our power to leave this beautiful state better off for our children and grandchildren.

Today, I am asking you to join me. Together let's build stronger families, stronger communities, and a stronger Washington.

May God bless these United States. May God bless the great state of Washington.